

My name is Whitney Leonard, and I am here on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council and our more than 6,000 members and activists in Montana. Our office is in Livingston and we really appreciate the opportunity to come up to Helena and share our thoughts with you, so thank you for giving us a chance to comment on this bill.

We at NRDC urge the committee to vote down Senate Bill 144, as it would be bad for Montana's wildlife, bad for Montana's hunting opportunities, bad for Montana's thriving tourist economy, and bad for Montana's citizens.

Bison are valued by Montanans across the state as a part of our heritage, and we have a rare opportunity to make wild bison a part of our future, too. At the Fish, Wildlife and Parks commission meeting last week, we saw overwhelming public support for restoring wild bison in Montana.

Restoring wild bison is not a radical idea. And it's not unprecedented. Other states like Wyoming and Utah are successfully

managing free-roaming bison herds that bring in steady revenues through hunting and tourism. In Utah's Henry Mountains, as well as in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, hundreds of highly sought-after bison tags bring revenue to the states and help fuel the local hunting and outfitting economy. In Arizona, Alaska, and South Dakota too, bison tags running anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars bring significant revenue to the states.

In Montana, with thousands of hunters annually vying for the extremely limited bison hunting opportunities in the state, it would be a huge mistake to prevent Montana from even considering the restoration of a huntable wild bison population. Montana can't afford to sit on the sidelines and miss this opportunity any longer.

[Also, just to be clear, brucellosis would NOT be an issue with a restored bison herd – nobody is talking about moving animals with brucellosis. The bison from the Yellowstone quarantine study, one possible source for a new wild herd, are 100% disease-free and have been subjected to far more rigorous testing than any cattle herd in the

country. So again, brucellosis would not be an issue with a new wild bison herd.]

Finally, we have seen Fish, Wildlife and Parks moving extremely carefully and thoughtfully as they explore the possibility of bison restoration, seeking input from a wide range of stakeholders in discussion sessions across the state. It is clear that FWP would not reintroduce a wild bison herd without consulting the public extensively.

[There is room for both bison and cattle in this Last Best Place.] I urge you not to slam the door on the opportunity for Montana to consider restoring a huntable wild bison population in the state. Please vote down this bill.

Thank you.